

Vision Statement

Commuter rail will be planned, designed, and implemented to provide a unified, integrated, and efficient multimodal transportation system.

1.1 Background

The Metropolitan Council predicts that by the year 2020, the Twin Cities metropolitan area will grow by 650,000 people and 3,330,000 households, adding 2.4 million daily automobile trips to the region's highways.

"For too long, limited solutions have existed to solving transportation problems", Governor Ventura's Strategic Directions for Minnesota goes on to challenge us to develop diverse options to address those transportation problems. The Commuter Rail System Plan provides a strategy to incorporate commuter rail as part of an integrated transportation system that will provide alternative choices to the automobile for commuters in Minnesota.

In January 1999 the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) presented the results of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Commuter Rail Feasibility Study to the Minnesota Legislature. After hearing those results the legislature passed M.S. 174.80 to 174.90 which gave the Commissioner of Mn/DOT the authority to plan, design, construct, and operate commuter rail in the State of Minnesota. Further, the Commissioner was charged with the responsibility of developing a commuter rail system plan that would ensure that, if built, commuter rail would be part of an integrated transportation system that would interface with all other forms of transportation including light rail transit (LRT), buses, park and ride, bicycles, and pedestrians. In developing the Commuter Rail System Plan Mn/DOT has built on the results from the Twin Cities Metropolitan Commuter Rail Feasibility Study and in particular the implementation strategy presented in the final report.

The commuter rail system plan addresses the following:

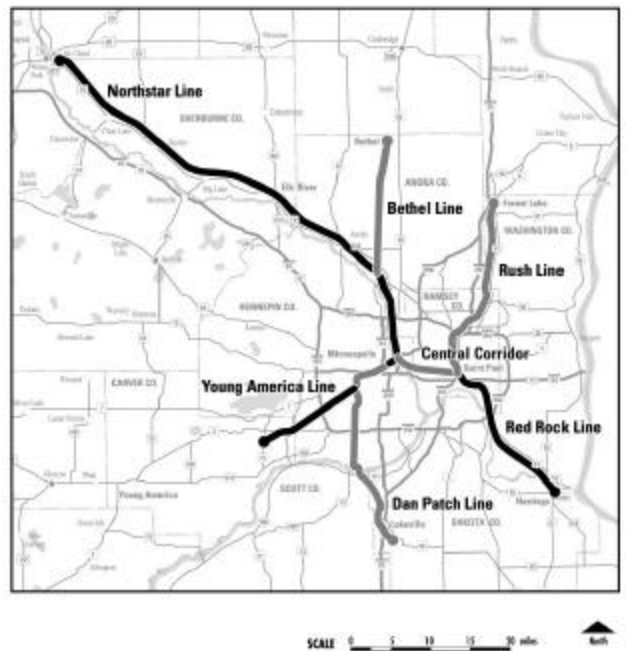
- How Mn/DOT will manage the authority provided for in legislation,
- Describes in detail the process that commuter rail corridors must follow to obtain Mn/DOT approval to move forward with implementation of commuter rail,
- Provides a single point of authority to advance commuter rail implementation,
- Establishes ground rules for the funding and financing of all aspects of commuter rail activity,

- Develops engineering standards for system components,
- Declares a framework for conducting negotiations with the host railroad(s), and
- Declares the necessity of coordination of commuter rail with all other transportation plans and transit services.

The commuter rail system plan has been developed as a prescriptive tool that ensures commuter rail will be accomplished in a cooperative and consistent manner that provides to the maximum extent possible, coordination among stakeholders. The system plan reinforces the legislative direction that has placed Mn/DOT in charge of the planning, design, construction, and operation of commuter rail and the system plan that commuter rail will only be advanced where it is consistent with the transportation plans of affected metropolitan planning organizations and with the implementation strategy contained in the system plan itself.

1.2 Implementation Strategy

The Commuter Rail System Plan, as stated earlier, builds on the results of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Commuter Rail Feasibility Study and in particular focuses on the implementation strategy presented in the Final Summary Report. This implementation strategy provided for a two tiered and staged implementation of six (6) commuter rail corridors and the central corridor connecting the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, as shown in the map.



"The Commuter Rail System Plan builds on the results of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Commuter Rail Feasibility Study"

"Within the Commuter Rail System Plan the implementation strategy has been modified only slightly."

"Revised legislation provides Mn/DOT the authority to plan for commuter rail beyond the seven county metropolitan area"

Tier I staging was presented as follows:

- Stage 1 – Northstar corridor from Elk River to Minneapolis,
- Stage 2 – Red Rock corridor from Hastings to St. Paul,
- The Minneapolis to St. Paul connection may be implemented in Stage 1 or Stage 2 and must be implemented no later than Stage 2, and
- Stage 3 – Dan Patch corridor from Lakeville to Minneapolis.

Tier II included the following corridors with no staging or priority for implementation suggested:

- Bethel to Minneapolis,
- Forest Lake to St. Paul,
- Norwood-Young America to Minneapolis, and
- Extension of existing corridors.

Within the Commuter Rail System Plan the implementation strategy has been modified only slightly. It has been modified by extending the Northstar Corridor termini from Elk River to the St. Cloud area reflecting the authority given to Mn/DOT to plan commuter rail beyond the seven county metropolitan area. In addition, it has been modified to reflect that the Minneapolis to St. Paul connector will be implemented with the Red Rock Corridor.

Justification for these modifications include the following:

- Revised legislation provides Mn/DOT the authority to plan for commuter rail beyond the seven county metropolitan area,
- The Northstar Corridor Development Authority has actively pursued implementation of commuter rail service to the St. Cloud area consistent with its federal funding authority, and
- The Twin Cities Metropolitan Commuter Rail Feasibility Study identified significant value in implementing the central corridor with the Red Rock (Hastings) corridor rather than implementing it with the Northstar Corridor.

Specifically, ridership on the Red Rock Corridor is extremely dependent on through trips to downtown Minneapolis. The same is not true for the Northstar Corridor ridership dependence on trips through to downtown St. Paul.